



**Federal Aviation  
Administration**

**Russ Chew 1-800-FAA-NEWS Phone Message  
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**Hello, this is Russ Chew with this week's update for April 7th**

As most of you know, we reached an impasse this week in contract negotiations with the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA). As the Administrator said, this has been a difficult, distracting time for all of us. And I want to echo her hope that this matter is quickly resolved.

To recap what's happened -- as required by Congressional statute, we submitted our best and final offer, along with NATCA's objections and comments, to Congress for their review. The Congress has 60 days to act, and if it chooses not to act, the agency's final proposal can be implemented.

Of course, we'll do our best to keep you updated with any new developments. You can read about all of the details of these submissions on the FAA employee website, so I won't go into them here. But what I do want to talk about are some of my personal concerns about what this means to all of us, both management and non-management, union and non-union.

It would be an understatement to say that contract negotiations can easily put stresses and strains on all of our relationships with each another, especially between management and non-management, because that's where this basic disagreement exists.

Since the FAA was created almost a half century ago, negotiating for pay is relatively new, and our discipline of how we conduct ourselves in these emotion-packed situations becomes very important. For the first time since negotiating for pay was introduced, many of us may find ourselves unprepared and uncomfortable with how we feel about what's going on. If left unchecked and undisciplined, the resulting emotional "roller coaster ride" can have lasting effects on everyone for many years to come. That is why it's important for all of us to understand what's basically going on – and why it's important to that we all follow the rules and processes that were set up to help us resolve our differences.

Nowadays, we like to think of ourselves as "professionals" who are dedicated to providing safe and efficient air traffic control services for our country. But what does that really mean? In its most classic definition, a "profession" is characterized by a "code of ethics", typically a "higher standard" to which each person "professed" to be held accountable. Other professional traits are higher levels of skills, training, and an unselfish commitment to a greater cause.

Although ministry, medicine, and law were the only three occupations that were historically regarded as "professions", it's become more generally accepted that other occupations had these same characteristics – and should be considered "professions" as well. From my perspective, and for many others around the world, our job fits does that definition – and along with it, carries a special responsibility that each of us must personally hold ourselves -- and each other -- accountable for.

Actually, I see it everyday in both the field and at headquarters. Our people are known for performing unselfishly in support of our commitment to the mission and vision of something greater than ourselves. It's the hallmark of the modern definition of professionalism. I think we all take great pride in this part of our performance, and it's important that we continue to conduct ourselves this way – even in this most challenging time.

Actually, the FAA and NATCA agreed on many important issues during negotiations; but unfortunately, several basic issues remain unresolved – with pay being the most notable. It would be easy use this particular issue to paint a black-and-white picture of what's going on; but the “truth” is rarely that simple or easy to explain. As is well known in even domestic differences at home, money issues can become very emotional all by itself; and it's no different here.

We should all be very careful not to jump to conclusions that “we don't appreciate or care about how hard our people work,” or that “the controllers don't care about anyone but themselves.” These simplistic attitudes can carry a great emotional burden for all of us for a very long time, so I ask everyone not to succumb to this path. For each of us, it means reaffirming our personal and professional commitment to our most important task right now – and that's providing safe and efficient air traffic control services.

Everything in our business – pay, job performance, future technology, the nation's economy -- are all linked together and affect each other in the long run. Being as efficient as we can be right now, while we look for innovative ways to be even more efficient at providing safer services, is important for our existing and future workforce. It's the fundamental requirement for the continued growth of our jobs, our profession, our economy, and ultimately, our standard of living for us and our children.

Like all true professionals, we must work through the process of resolving our contract disputes, and do our best to keep our emotions at bay during this trying time. This is not the time for any of us, whether management or union, to vilify each other with “sound-bites” that make us feel better for the moment, but destroy our future together. In the end, we need to work together to build a strong and lasting system for our country, our customers, and our employees.

As public servants, our unselfish commitment to what we do is why we can call ourselves “professionals.” And right now, more than ever, the safety of our service requires that we live up to this most-important trait. I realize that all contract disputes are rough; but rough as they are, it should never diminish the enormous respect and appreciation I know we all have for the work that our air traffic controllers do.

That’s all for this week. Thanks for listening.